



THE UTILISATION OF ORGANISATIONAL LEARNING CAPABILITIES FOR ORGANISATIONAL SUSTAINABILITY

A dissertation submitted by

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ABSTRACT

This research study investigates the organisational learning processes of discovery, choice and action related to organisational sustainability. In particular it investigates the Research Question ‘How do organisations utilise their organisational learning capabilities for sustainability purposes?’ The research into this question, which has been largely ignored in previous research, results in the building of a framework that differentiates organisations according to a number of different orientations. For each orientation that emerged from the research, a number of different mechanisms for organisational learning capabilities were identified.

The research is based on a multiple case study approach using thirteen cases. These are a mixture of commercial companies in both manufacturing and service sectors and not-for-profit organisations, and are drawn from organisations in Europe, South East Asia and Australia. In-depth interviews were conducted with senior management executives to determine how they used their organisational learning capabilities with respect to strategic management, performance management and organisational renewal. The information gathered from these interviews was analysed and, from the results, there emerged a number of different orientations for each of the three areas of investigation. For strategic learning, orientations identified were entrepreneurial, path-dependent and builder; for performance learning they were technical, cultural and interpersonal; and for organisational renewal they were planned change and emergent innovation. The organisations studied provided one or more examples of each of the orientations identified.

Looking at how the cases approached a number of different mechanisms of organisational learning capabilities, it emerged that each of the orientations identified demonstrated very different approaches to the use of organisational learning capabilities. Resulting from this analysis, matrices have been built demonstrating the way a number of key learning capabilities are commonly found in each of the different orientations identified.

For strategic management, three orientations were identified—entrepreneurial, path-dependent and builder; for performance management the orientations identified were

technical, cultural and interpersonal; and for organisational renewal two orientations emerged—planned change and emergent innovation.

This classification provides a useful theoretical framework of organisational orientations mapped against key learning capabilities, enabling an understanding of the application of learning capabilities in different organisations. It forms a basis for further theoretical research, as well as a practical framework for senior managers to consider alternative ways of using their organisational learning capabilities to ensure sustainability of their organisations.

In addition to the three primary research issues, a fourth research issue was included, investigating the impact of the political style of leaders of the organisations on the utilisation of organisational learning capabilities. Four different themes were identified.

CERTIFICATION OF DISSERTATION

I certify that the ideas, results, analyses and conclusions reported in this dissertation are entirely my own effort, except where otherwise acknowledged. I also certify that the work is original and has not been previously submitted for any other award, except where otherwise acknowledged.

Candidate: David Graham Demetrius

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'David Graham Demetrius', enclosed within a large, loopy oval shape.

Signature of Candidate

Date 24 October 2012

ENDORSEMENT

Supervisor: Dr Bruce Millett

Signature of Supervisor

Date

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